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ABSTRACT

Considerations in designing and implementing family literacy programs for the limited-English-speaking population are examined and some solutions are illustrated in one federally-funded program for Latino families, Project FLAME (Family Literacy: Aprendiendo, Mejorando, Educando/Learning, Bettering, Educating). An introductory section looks at the family's role in children's learning and barriers to family involvement in education. Family literacy programs are seen as a means of forging closer ties between homes and schools. Project FLAME, which emphasizes the role of parents as teachers, is then described. A discussion of program development looks at these considerations: taking the appropriate first steps; determining the location and scheduling of classes; curriculum design; language of instruction; selecting instructional materials; staffing; maintenance of attendance and involvement; and program evaluation. A Project FLAME model lesson plan and a list of resource organizations are appended. Contains 29 references. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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FAMILY LITERACY FOR LANGUAGE MINORITY FAMILIES: ISSUES FOR PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

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"The dramatic learning gains apparent for Project FLAME children can be unambiguously attributed to *parent action.* "

Family Literacy for Language Minority Families: Issues for Program Implementation

Introduction: The Role of the Family in Children's Learning

Faced with the challenge of educating an increasingly diverse student population, educators are looking beyond the school walls toward families and communities as resources for fostering academic success for all. Although families have always played an important role in promoting the academic success of their children (Swap 1993), changing demographics have forced schools to rethink the ways in which they reach out to families. Parents play many roles in their children's education. They provide for their children's physical and emotional needs and assure their attendance at school. Through communication with the school, they act as liaisons for their children as they cross home-school boundaries. They provide materials and space for their children's homework and model the use of literacy and other knowledge. Parents also play the role of teacher, either directly (by teaching their children to count or write their names, for example) or indirectly (such as by reading and talking to their children). They also play important roles within the school as volunteers or by participating in school governance activities .

Several factors can disrupt or prevent parents from assuming these roles. According to Swap (1993), barriers to involvement include difficult family circumstances, school norms that do not support partnerships, limited resources, and the lack of information on establishing successful home-school relations. Family literacy programs have great potential for overcoming these barriers, particularly for families who are not currently well served in America's schools. This document will describe some successful approaches to family literacy for language minority children and their parents.

Barriers to Family Involvement

Several demographic changes have altered the configuration of the family. Over the past few decades there have been substantial increases in the proportion of mothers working outside the home, single parent families, and language minority children in the schools. These changes affect parents' abilities to be involved in their children's schooling in several ways. Working parents may have less time to attend and participate in school activities. Financial constraints limit the resources families can provide for their children and may lead parents to work long hours. Language minority parents' school participation may also be hindered by their limited proficiency in English or lack of familiarity with American culture. Moreover, immigrant parents often have had very limited educational opportunities themselves and, even in the best of circumstances, are usually unfamiliar with education practices in the United States.

Given this social context, language minority parents are often reluctant to contact teachers about their children's education. For example, many Latino and Asian parents view teachers as pedagogical experts and are unlikely to interfere in what they view as the teacher's domain (Flores, Cousin, and Diaz 1991; Yao 1988). Unfortunately, this may translate into teachers' opinions that language minority parents are unconcerned about the education of their children. However, research indicates that these families are highly concerned and are willing to help their children succeed in school, though they are uncertain of how to do so (Delgado-Gaitan 1990; Epstein 1990; Goldenberg 1993; Goldenberg and Gallimore 1991). Economic well-being is closely related to parent involvement, yet it is unrelated to the value parents place on education (Lareau 1990).

New ways must be found to bridge the home-school gap for linguistic/cultural minority and low-income families. These families have high expectations for their children but are unsure how to foster their success in school. Research shows that school policies and teacher practices can determine whether parents participate in their children's education without regard to race, parent education, family size, marital status, or grade level (Epstein 1990). Schools, then, play a critical role in reaching out to families to inform them about school practices, to understand home cultures, and to draw on them as resources for teaching and learning. To address these issues, schools across the country are forging partnerships with other institutions to create family literacy programs.

Family Literacy

Family literacy programs are one means of forging closer ties between homes and schools for the purpose of increasing student achievement. Family literacy is based on the notion that literacy, because it is social and cultural in nature, is best developed within the context of the family. Family literacy situates literacy learning within the context of the daily lives of participating families, acknowledges a broad range of culturally influenced ways of knowing, and provides greater access to and comfort in dealing with schools.

Family literacy programs are unique in that they offer simultaneous and connected educational opportunities for both adults and children in a family (Shanahan, Mulhern, and Rodriguez-Brown, in press). Any program that includes literacy within the family

context could be referred to as a family literacy program. The program described here, however, specifically fosters the development of children's literacy by supporting the home literacy social network. Auerbach (1989) offers a broad definition of family literacy that includes direct parent-child interactions based around literacy tasks as well as opportunities for parents to develop their literacy abilities by focusing on pertinent issues such as family and community problems, child-rearing concerns, home language and culture, and interactions with the school system. For language minority families, learning English is often a key component of these programs. Family literacy is not limited to those projects that focus on the development of young children's literacy, though many programs do limit their scope to only include families with preschool or primary grade children.

Family literacy programs have proliferated over the past decade, yet there is no one model that exemplifies all the possible configurations of parent-child learning situations. However, successful programs *do* share several characteristics. These include: addressing parents' personal goals, valuing families' home languages, viewing families from a resource model rather than a deficit model, providing families access to information and resources that will encourage success for children, and encouraging shared literacy experiences in homes rather than imposing a school-like transfer of skills from parent to child (Ada 1988; Auerbach 1989; Paratore, in press; Quintero and Huerta-Macias 1990; Shanahan and Rodriguez-Brown 1993). The following section provides a description of one program that shares these goals.

Project FLAME: A Family Literacy Project for Latinos

Project FLAME (Family Literacy: Aprendiendo, Mejorando, Educando/Learning, Bettering, Educating) is a program that provides literacy training and support for limited English proficient Latino parents so that they can influence their children's literacy and academic achievement in a positive manner. The project is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (OBEMLA), the University of Illinois at Chicago, and private foundations. Based in six elementary schools serving largely Latino populations (Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Central American groups), the project serves approximately 15-20 families in each school. Each of these families has at least one child who is between three- and nine-years-old.

The design of Project FLAME includes two integrated components—*Parents as Teachers* sessions and *Parents as Learners* sessions. The bimonthly *Parents as Teachers* sessions are conducted in Spanish and focus on four areas of home literacy influence: literacy modeling (encouraging parents to model literacy uses for their children); literacy opportunities (increasing the range of literacy materials available in the home); literacy interactions (demonstrating ways to engage in literacy activities with children); and home-school relationships (providing opportunities for teacher–parent discussions and classroom observation). Table 1 lists the session topics during one year of the project.

The *Parents as Learners* sessions meet twice weekly and focus on English as a second language (ESL) or Basic Skills classes. These sessions are designed to meet the specific education needs of the parents in the program and are connected to the *Parents as Teachers*

Table 1

Project FLAME — Parents as Teachers Sessions

Creating Home Literacy Centers

Creating and using a literacy activity center in a box that includes pencils, crayons, paper, scissors, paste, magazines, pictures, and so on.

Book Sharing

The most effective ways to share books with children. How to talk about books and share books when your own literacy is limited.

Book Selection

Quality criteria for selecting books appropriate for children's needs and interests.

Library Visit

Public library tour, complete with applications for library cards.

Book Fairs

Parents buy (with coupons) English- or Spanish-language books for their children.

Teaching the ABCs

Simple ways to teach letters and sounds. Emphasis on language games, songs, and language experience activities.

Children's Writing

How young children write and ways to encourage home writing.

Community Literacy

How parents can share their own literacy uses with their children while at the market and during other daily activities.

Classroom Observations

How parents can visit classrooms to gain a sense of how their children are taught in the schools.

Parent–Teacher Get-Togethers

Guided discussions about children's education with teachers and principals.

Math at Home

Games and activities for helping children to understand numbers and arithmetic.

Parents and Homework

Ways parents can monitor and help with children's homework even when they cannot do the homework themselves.

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sessions. In addition, parents are invited to the university for summer institutes where speakers address related community issues and education themes.

Because Project FLAME is a university-based project, graduate students in bilingual/ESL education programs originally taught both the *Parents as Learners* and *Parents as Teachers* sessions. As the program expanded, we were able to develop a training program that employed previous participants as the teachers for the *Parents as Teachers* sessions. In this way, family literacy became a means for developing the capabilities of parents as literacy leaders in their schools and communities.

Several key features distinguish Project FLAME from other literacy programs for language minority families, the most notable being its comprehensiveness. Some programs, for example, only emphasize parent–child book-sharing activities. Project FLAME, on the other hand, embeds this valuable activity within a rich network of other parent-child literacy interactions. FLAME neither relies entirely on a skills-based orientation to reading instruction, nor neglects the value of skills learning for children. Unlike many other programs, Project FLAME trusts that parents will have a major, positive impact on their children's learning. The dramatic learning gains apparent for FLAME children can be unambiguously attributed to *parent action*. Finally, FLAME attempts to build capacity within the community to sustain the program once university and federal support are no longer available.

Now completing its fifth year, FLAME has achieved great success. It is the largest family literacy program in Chicago and has provided education services to over 300 families. Program evaluations have consistently documented that children whose families have participated in Project FLAME score 30 points higher than their peers on standardized tests and require fewer special school services, such as tutoring. Besides contributing to their children's literacy development and academic success, the project's parents have also begun to use their newly acquired skills to affect change in their own lives and within their communities. Three parents, for example, now hold seats on the local school council; others have engaged in a letter-writing campaign for better health care services in the neighborhood, enrolled in community colleges, or secured employment since joining the program.

Developing and implementing a comprehensive family literacy program for language minority families requires a well-designed plan and collaboration between several institutions. The remainder of this monograph will outline a set of questions that need to be addressed in planning family literacy programs. Project FLAME and other programs for language minority families will be used as examples to provide a framework for answering some practical questions concerning the successful development and operation of a family literacy program.

Questions About Establishing a Family Literacy Project

1. What are the first steps?

The first steps that will help ensure a successful program include establishing collaborative relationships with other institutions and determining the needs of the participants and available resources. Family literacy projects often take a multidisciplinary approach as they draw on the expertise of child educators, adult literacy providers, community agencies, and institutions of higher education (Nickse 1990). Early discussions across institutions help determine the feasibility of establishing cooperative relationships and the extent to which resources can be shared. Financial resources need to be sorted out and possibilities for securing funding from local, state, and federal grants discussed.

At the planning stage it is essential to determine the level of need for and interest in family literacy within a particular community. The best methods for accessing this information are discussions with parents at school meetings or in community settings and surveys of community members. Questions should focus on parents' views of their children's education, their relationships with and expectations of the school, and their desires to advance their own language and literacy abilities. Parents who are currently active in the school can be instrumental in reaching out to those who participate less frequently. Other community organizations, such as religious institutions and day care centers, can also play a role in attracting families to the program.

2. Where and when should classes take place?

Schools can be an ideal location for literacy programs because many parents already accompany their children to and from school. Parents who previously entered the school infrequently may begin to feel a sense of belonging and may come to associate their learning success in a literacy program with the school. Separate parent rooms are ideal, but other spaces in the school can serve equally well. However, it is best if the space can be available consistently because, if they are frequently asked to move to accommodate other programs and events, parents may begin to feel that the school does not welcome their presence. Space provisions should also be made for preschool children; it is best if they can be kept close to the parents without unnecessarily interrupting the classes.

However, if parents have had negative experiences in schools (e.g., from their own schooling or because they are invited to school only when their children are in trouble) alternative locations might be secured. This was the case with a literacy program described by Ada (1988) where the public library was chosen because it offered a more comfortable environment. Recent inquiries about expanding Project FLAME to a Cambodian community indicate that the families want part of the program to take place in the apartment complex where many of them live. Other potential sites for family literacy programs include community centers, churches, and adult education sites.

Determining an appropriate time for holding classes should be negotiated with the participants and program providers. Evening classes may be ideal in some communities as they allow for greater participation by parents who work during the day. However, as is the

case with Project FLAME, gang-related problems or high levels of crime in urban neighborhoods may lead parents to prefer daytime classes. In addition, evening access to schools can be impossible in many urban areas. Programs that include both parents and school-age children might best be scheduled immediately after school (Quintero and Huerta-Macias 1990).

Transportation is another factor to consider in choosing a program site. Some neighborhoods are particularly concentrated and transportation is not a major issue. However, accessibility does promote attendance so, if families live at a distance from the site, it is best to provide transportation, if possible.

3. How should the curriculum be designed?

Curriculum design should reflect the needs of both parent and child participants. Initial information-gathering meetings with parents regarding their desire to participate in the program provide opportunities to find out about these needs. Yet it is important to note that such openness might be misunderstood by the participants because parents expect teachers to know what to teach. Asking for suggestions of this type, therefore, may inadvertently give parents the impression that the teachers are not qualified. Therefore, as an alternative, teachers can begin these sessions with discussions on general topics such as family and school experiences in order to draw out parents' needs and interests. Feedback from the principal and other teachers can also help shape the curriculum; find out how they hope parents will participate in their children's education.

Flexibility is an essential design feature. In Project FLAME, for example, the *Parents as Teachers* sessions began with specific objectives and activities, but sessions on Helping with Homework and Math at Home were later added at the parents' request, and existing sessions were modified to meet parent needs more effectively. Topics for summer institutes have also drawn from issues parents frequently bring up during the school year (A sample lesson plan from one session is included in Appendix A.). Flexibility was also apparent within the ESL classes and other activities of the *Parents as Learners* component. Again, some objectives were pre-established, but parents could easily change these if another issues or concern was more pressing. For example, the mothers at one school asked that the ESL classes focus on the English needed to complete job applications and to deal with other employment issues; appropriate activities were initiated in response to this request.

Family literacy programs may offer instruction to adults only, adults and children together, or adults and children separately. Regardless of the design, parents should be aware that a major purpose of the program is to increase participants' opportunities to learn so that they, in turn, can better share literacy with their children. In Project FLAME we linked our ESL and Basic Skills classes to the *Parents as Teachers* sessions by using part of the ESL classes to prepare for and follow-up the parent-child literacy lessons. We also gave families homework, usually asking them to try out activities with their children and report their experiences in the ESL classes.

A few examples of other family literacy program designs will illustrate the range of possible curricula. Project FIEL (Family Initiative for English Literacy) consists of twelve

sessions on learner-centered themes designed to offer learning experiences for parents and children together (Quintero and Huerta-Macias 1990). Each session begins with a discussion, followed by a hands-on learning project (e.g., cooking, making puppets), a language-experience activity involving writing and reading about the project, a book reading demonstration, and a home activity.

Another literacy project in Pajaro Valley, California, centered on children's literature in Spanish (Ada 1988). Parent participation in each session included extensive dialogue around a selection of children's literature. From this, parents learned effective ways to share books with their children. They were able to take home books, lists of suggested activities, and blank notebooks for their children to use to write their own stories. At school, the children engaged in reading and authoring their own books and were excited about extending these experiences to their homes.

4. What language(s) should be used for instruction?

Literacy programs serving language minority populations need to consider how English and participants' native language(s) will be used for instruction. There are several reasons for programs to include the use of home language(s) for instruction. First, parents need to be reassured that their linguistic abilities in a language other than English are strengths and that their children will benefit if they are provided a solid base in that language. When parents are encouraged to model literacy in their strongest language, it is more likely that they will positively influence their children's literacy development. Research indicates that native language development offers important cognitive, psychological, and social foundations for development, including eventual acquisition of English (Cummins 1986; Garcia 1993; Fillmore 1991). By using home languages to talk about and demonstrate family literacy activities, participants learn the value of maintaining them.

Second, for language minority parents who are not yet proficient in English, native language instruction ensures adequate learning opportunities. Novice English learners will have difficulty fully participating in an English-only instructional setting. Unable to ask questions or share their knowledge of family practices, for them, the sessions can be little more than a teacher telling information to parents.

Third, even in classes designed to increase parents' English abilities, there is growing evidence that the use of the first language is pedagogically appropriate (Moll and Diaz 1987), especially for learners with limited literacy (Auerbach 1993). When teachers are proficient in the students' native language(s) they can explain fine points of English and support further development of native language skills.

In Project FLAME, Spanish was the primary language used in the *Parents as Teachers* sessions focusing on home literacy activities. Both English and Spanish were used in the ESL classes, although English was used more frequently, especially with the more proficient students. Teachers tailored lessons to include Spanish, depending on student needs. For example, a teacher who taught parents with little previous schooling used dialogue journals in Spanish to foster Spanish literacy development.

Project FIEL (Quintero and Huerta-Macias 1990) also used a biliteracy approach with Spanish-speaking parents. Teachers and students alternated between languages so that students could use their own voices. Project directors explain that, "by accepting the use of both languages in the classroom when it seems natural, we validate the past and present sociolinguistic experiences of the parents and children and make the learning process meaningful and positive for each participant." (Quintero and Huerta-Macias 1990, p. 308).

Programs for multilingual, multicultural families use alternative ways of including native languages in the classroom. Paratore (in press) describes classes taught by a team of five people including two teachers and three tutors. The teams included some members who spoke the dominant native languages of the students (Spanish, Vietnamese, and Khmer). This configuration allowed interaction across language groups as well as native language support in small groups.

To summarize, then, language choices should reflect the linguistic abilities of the participants, acknowledge their strengths, and use their native language(s) as a base for English language development. Programs serving diverse communities will have a greater challenge to provide native language support, especially where bilingual teachers and instructional materials are less available. Regardless of the population served, participants should feel that their home language is a valuable, appropriate resource for developing their children's literacy.

5. What do ESL classes within family literacy programs look like?

What kind of instructional materials are needed? ESL classes for family literacy often have much in common with other adult ESL classes. They focus on the English that adults need to negotiate their lives in the United States and may include the English that they need to assist with their children's schooling.

Project FLAME teachers use a thematic unit approach to develop lessons around topics of interest to parents. Some popular topics highlight health and medical issues, careers, food, family and cultural issues, and education. A lesson on communicating with medical personnel, reading prescription labels, and filling out medical forms exemplifies how we deal directly with parental requests for oral and written English. Other lessons focus on issues in the families' lives such as crime in their neighborhoods, or comparisons of cultural traditions in native countries and the United States. These lessons give parents an opportunity to speak and write about their lives, legitimizing their experiences and providing the teachers insights to the families. Both oral and written language experiences are included in the lesson plans.

Teachers need to invest adequate time in searching for materials for family literacy. There are no ready-made books that will adequately fill the range of interests and needs of the families. ESL textbooks are a good starting point for ideas, but these texts are often skill-like in nature and do not encourage or support more extensive reading and writing activities. Auerbach and Burgess (1985) have criticized these texts for imposing middle-class American cultural values on people with different cultures and values. In addition,

textbooks usually do not offer adequate flexibility in addressing the wide range of proficiency levels in adult education classes.

Better sources of instructional resources include newspapers, job applications, food labels, advertisements, and other written materials from the community. Since the major purpose of the program is to help parents support their children's learning, report cards, school permission slips, and children's literature can be good sources, too. Participants can also provide materials; ask them to bring examples of written materials they would like to understand.

Both children's and adult literature are excellent sources of well-written text that focuses on pertinent themes in families' lives. In one Project FLAME unit on language issues, examples of literature were used as a starting point for reading, writing, and speaking about how parents' and children's learning of English affects their lives. The book, *I Speak English For My Mom* (Stanek 1989), provided a child's perspective on how it feels to be asked to translate for a parent who does not speak English. From the parent's perspective, the poem, *Elena* (Pat Mora in *Vigil*, 1987), described the difficulties a mother faced learning English because she felt unsupported by family members.

Teachers might expect adults to be insulted if children's literature is used for instruction. Several programs, however, report that parents show enthusiasm for reading children's literature (Ada 1988; Handel and Goldsmith 1989). Parents who find a wider variety of books that they can read successfully can share the books with their children and relate the themes of the books to issues in the families' lives. Recently, there has been an increase in the number of books published in both English and other languages; these allow greater emphasis to be placed on building first language (L1) skills and improving comprehension of the books by novice English learners. Children's Book Press in San Francisco, California, is a good source of bilingual books. For a useful review of children's literature in Spanish see Hudelson, Fournier, Espinosa, and Bachman 1994.

ESL educators must be sensitive to the wide variety of previous experiences parents have had in schools, both in the first and second languages. In Project FLAME we saw this wide range of experience. Some parents who enrolled had been teachers in Mexico, while others had only a few years (or less) of formal schooling. Even with small class sizes (seven to 12 students per teacher), it was essential that we used materials at a range of levels of difficulty. It was also helpful to provide opportunities for collaborative learning and to constantly draw on the knowledge and linguistic strengths of the students, viewing them positively, as users of multiple literacies.

6. How do we successfully staff a program?

Teachers who are sensitive to diverse cultures and have a broad knowledge of adult and child literacy development are essential to the success of family literacy programs. Those who have had previous experience working with the community and in education settings are an asset, but even these teachers may benefit from further preparation or inservice training. Because family literacy is a fairly new area for many institutions, teachers must clearly understand the goals of the program and the interconnectedness of parent and child

learning. In hiring teachers, efforts should be made to recruit those who come from the same community as the participants since they can offer insightful personal knowledge about community practices that will inform other staff members. Proficiency in the language of the participants, especially in programs using a bilingual approach, is also necessary.

Literacy programs that are school-based may take advantage of elementary school teachers as instructors. One caution about this approach is that family literacy does not mean merely translating school literacy practices to the home. Teachers must understand the situational contexts of the home and view home literacy interactions as shared experiences that are not unidirectional from parent to child (Auerbach 1989; Shanahan, Mulhern, and Rodriguez-Brown, in press). Parents may also be more hesitant to challenge the authority of a professional teacher than they would be in alternative adult education settings. Yet this model does offer teachers and parents an opportunity to become more equal partners in fostering children's success and bridging gaps that exist between home and school.

Paraprofessionals are critical links between families and the family literacy program. Project FLAME hires community liaisons, usually parents or staff members who parents know well, to communicate directly with the families. The liaisons' knowledge of community members enables them to assist in recruitment and retention. Because some families do not have telephones, liaisons can make home visits to inform parents about activities or find out why they are not attending class. It is important to note that discretion should be used in this practice as parents may find it intrusive (Paratore, in press).

When young children accompany their parents to class, the provision of childcare will allow parents to concentrate on their own learning. Community members often fill these positions and can be supported with ideas for educational activities and play materials. Even when children participate in class activities, extra hands are often needed as parents may have several children, some too young to participate in a meaningful way.

7. How can attendance and involvement be maintained?

The best means of keeping attendance steady is to provide a quality program that meets the needs of the participants. However, providers should be aware of the realities of the lives of the families involved and be flexible with attendance policies. In Chicago, Illinois, where Project FLAME operates, severe cold weather and snow often makes it difficult for mothers with young children to attend classes during the winter months. Illness also interferes with attendance and parents have to go to the clinic in the early morning (which is when classes are held) to ensure that they can see a doctor. Also, winter trips to Mexico often extend past the school break; the program attempts to accommodate this, encouraging parents to draw on these experiences as they continue to work with their children. (Such travel is common and can be disruptive to children's schooling. However, one of the benefits of a school-based family literacy program is that parents are more likely to inform their ESL teacher of travel schedules, thereby allowing the school to plan around the absences and provide materials or homework.)

Our *Parents as Teachers* sessions were designed so that parents would increase the availability of literacy materials in their homes. In the first session, families were provided crayons, pencils, scissors, and other materials to create a home literacy center for their children. Two book fairs where parents could purchase books with coupons were additional incentives for parents to continue their participation. Programs might convince local bookstores or other agencies to donate such materials. Even without them, however, programs can offer families new resources for promoting family literacy. Parents and children can make books and calendars, and do other educational activities; library cards can be obtained; and free publications are often available from the federal government.

Family literacy programs should be viewed not only as educational opportunities for families but as social ones, too. Research suggests that immigrant families often feel isolated from the school (Delgado-Gaitan 1990; Flores, Cousin, and Diaz 1991) and can benefit from sharing their experiences and knowledge. Many of the Project FLAME classes included a coffee break for parents to relax, share experiences with new friends, and visit their children. Around holiday time parents planned special events and invited the principal and other school personnel to celebrate with them. Many parents in Project FLAME found that the classes were important to them because of the close relationships they formed with teachers and other students.

8. How do we know the program is working?

Evaluations provide evidence of how family literacy programs are working and how they can be improved. Measures of the success of the program are usually necessary to assure funding agencies that their support is being well used. Further, program evaluation allows success to be monitored in an ongoing manner so that appropriate adjustments can be made. This allows programs to serve families better. The most effective assessment and evaluation methods consider multiple aspects of program performance.

Attendance and attrition. A basic measure of program success can be found in attendance and attrition data. Although attendance tends to vary greatly among participants depending on their individual life circumstances, average attendance rates do offer an indication of parents' commitment to a program. Typical adult basic education programs have attrition rates of about 50 percent (Sticht 1988-89), although some family literacy programs report rates as high as 74 percent (Paratore 1993). Factors such as visits to home countries and conflicts with other school-based programs should be taken into consideration when attendance is low; however, programmatic adjustments to increase participation should also be considered. Parent attendance records were maintained as part of Project FLAME's evaluation process. Parents were also interviewed when it was known that they were going to leave the program. Whenever possible, information on parents' reasons for discontinuing participation should be sought. Often, the reasons for these decisions include illness, relocation, and employment. If the reasons given are related to program delivery, then the need to make changes can be addressed.

Children's achievement. Because family literacy programs are designed to increase academic achievement, some assessment of this should be conducted. Direct measures

such as standardized test scores and pre- and posttests offer one kind of evaluation but are often limited in their ability to measure programmatic effects since the children receive instruction in other classes and/or programs. Some alternative measures include reports from parents on shared home literacy activities and interviews with teachers about changes in children's performance or parents' involvement after participation in a family literacy program. One program had children keep literacy journals and share them with their teacher (Paratore, in press). These children were eager to share their entries and discuss literacy experiences they had with their parents.

Project FLAME's evaluation included pre- and posttesting of preschool children on an annual basis. This testing emphasized children's language development (Boehm Test of Basic Concepts), print awareness (Marie Clay's Sand Test), as well as basic literacy skills (letter and phoneme recognition). For the older FLAME children, parents consented to allow us to use school records in our evaluation. We examined all the data collected by the schools on participants' school achievement, language proficiency, and enrollment in programs such as Chapter 1, Special Education, Gifted Education, and so on.

Parent achievement. Standardized tests, a traditional means of adult ESL or literacy assessment, are often preferred because they are cost effective and easily obtained and administered. These tests facilitate evaluations that require the inclusion of a comparison group. However, standardized tests are sometimes unrelated to the goals of the project, can lead teachers to teach to the test, and may intimidate adults who have already had negative experiences with schools. (For a lengthier discussion of the pitfalls of the predominant model of evaluation in adult ESL and suggestions for alternatives, see Auerbach 1992.)

In Project FLAME, parents completed English proficiency tests at the beginning and the end of each year; results were used to determine their instructional needs and to measure the gains resulting from their participation in the program. Additionally, FLAME parents were interviewed about their families and their experiences with literacy in their native language as well as English.

Alternative approaches to assessing adult learning and changes in family literacy practices allow a more comprehensive view of family literacy program outcomes. Even where standardized tests are required, supplementary evaluation instruments that are specifically tailored to a program's goals and design will provide findings about ongoing progress. These approaches include interviews, observations, and portfolios of student performance samples. (For a guide to alternative approaches to assessment and evaluation for U.S. Department of Education's Family English Literacy Programs, see Holt 1992)

Family portfolios enable literacy providers to document the effect of programs through a variety of measures. Some assessment tools to consider include: parental learning goals, self-evaluations, teacher observations, attitudes toward literacy, student reports of literacy use in the home and community, tape recordings of home literacy interactions, journal entries, writing samples, and reading samples. These portfolios identify student strengths and growth in literacy knowledge and use rather than weaknesses. In addition, they allow families to take a more active role in determining what is important to evaluate in family literacy programs and to monitor their own achievements.

Affective measures. Important changes in family literacy use often occur affectively and will not show up on traditional assessments. Therefore, interviews on parental beliefs about their roles in children's learning, attitudes toward school, and confidence in helping their children succeed in school, for example, will provide a rich source of data. When conducted prior to and following program participation, interviews can provide data on changes in home–school relationships and home literacy activities. Affective changes, as well as changes in life circumstances, can also be documented anecdotally. Anecdotes are descriptive accounts of significant events in a students or family's learning or living experiences. For example, one Project FLAME teacher noticed a change in some parents' attitudes toward allowing young children to handle books. Other teachers documented when parents obtained employment or enrolled in additional education programs. Because these incidents might not surface in other forms of assessment, staff members should be aware of the importance of documenting such successes to share with the families and program funders.

Other forms of program evaluation might include teacher lesson plans or journals, teacher observations, reports of staff meetings, and case studies of home literacy interactions with family volunteers. Most importantly, evaluations should provide insights as to why a program is successful and how it can be continually enhanced.

Conclusion

Family literacy is a new and exciting arena for improving the relationships between language minority families and schools by situating learning experiences in the context of the family. Designing and carrying out such a program requires a commitment that goes beyond traditional investments in improving home-school partnerships. We must look for new ways to provide useful and appropriate information about children's learning to parents who were not educated in this country, and we must learn to draw on the resources that families can offer to help bridge the home–school gap. Though family literacy programs often focus primarily on changing how families relate to schools, they must also begin to influence changes in the schools so that they can respond more effectively to the realities of family lives. As the field of family literacy develops, it has the chance to play a pivotal role in reshaping the education of language minority children, a difficult yet critical challenge.

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Appendix A — *Project Flame: Model Lesson Plan*

Book Sharing

Objectives

To provide families opportunities to read together.

To inform parents of the importance of book sharing.

To make parents aware of the six book sharing strategies that can make a difference in children's learning:

being close to the child;
letting the child take control;
letting the child see print;
modeling how to ask questions;
modeling how to answer questions; and
helping the child relate a book to his/her life.

Activities

1. Discuss the families' experiences with shared reading and how they can help children learn. Explain that the children who do best in school are read to by their parents (this is true even if the parents cannot read well). Explain to parents that:
   when they read to their children they are showing them that they care about books. Children will learn to value reading from their parents;
   children learn about how to read in ways that will help them to do better when they get to school; and
   books are fun. Children and parents can learn about themselves and the world through them.
2. ***Demonstration:*** Sit before the group of parents with a child; read aloud a simple book, modeling each of the six book sharing strategies; at different points explain to the parents what you are doing and why it is important.

   Strategies for parents:

   Closeness: Sit close to your child (s/he should be next to you or in your lap). This makes it a warm, pleasant time for parent and child and associates their love for each other with a love of reading.

   Let the child take control: It is good if your child turns pages, asks questions, asks you to reread a section. (*This might not happen in demonstration; talk about it anyway; this is important because children are trying to figure out how reading works by these responses.*) Invite the child to reread the book to you in his/her own way.

   Make sure the child can see the book: Point to print, point to pictures. Some children learn to read from this; they will become more familiar with print, the direction of reading, and so on.

Ask questions: Have the child name things (labeling); have the child retell what happens in a story (recounting). *Teachers ask these types of questions and children who are used to the process perform better in school.*

Answer questions: It is important to answer what your child asks because more learning occurs when a child is interested in the material *(Again, this might not come up in the demonstration).*

Relate the book to the child's life: Point out or ask your child about the relationship of things in the book to things in his/her lives (e.g., "See the truck. That is a truck like daddy's."). This helps maintain the child's interest and lets him/her draw connections with books.

3. Talk about activities that parents can use if they are not very good at reading. They can:
   point to pictures;
   talk about the book;
   make up stories; and
   ask and answer questions.
4. Have parents share books with their children (if there are not enough kids present, encourage parents to share children for this exercise). Be sure to have several appropriate picture books available in both English and the native language(s).
5. Have parents describe ways books can be shared; chart their answers (give parents a list of how to do this).
6. Have a discussion about when to read to children, what to read to them, and who should read to them. Ask parents how often and at what time(s) of day they could do this.

Homework

Teachers should:

make sure parents have books that can be shared with children;
tell parents to read to their children. Explain that the reading experience will be a topic of discussion at the next session;
remind parents to bring the book(s) they shared with their children to the next session;
have parents practice sharing picture books; and
talk about the shared reading experience in English.

ESL Follow Up

Have parents:

identify the books they shared;
describe how they shared the books;
tell when they shared the books;
describe how their children reacted; and
discuss problems and brainstorm solutions.

Literacy Session Follow Up

Show parents how to play "What If" with books (e.g., "What if the prince couldn't get out, what if the lion got loose...").

Resource Organizations

Bilingual Education Office
California Department of Education
P.O. Box 944272
Sacramento, CA 94244-2720
(916) 657-2435
Contact: Elena Vazquez
Disseminates information on LEP student issues, including the family context.

Center for Families, Schools, Communities and Children's Learning
Institute for Responsive Education
605 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 02215
(617) 353-3309
Co-Directors: Joyce Epstein and Don Davies
Research, evaluation, policy analysis, and information dissemination on families, schools, and children's learning.

Clearinghouse on Adult Education and Literacy (CAEL)
U.S. Department of Education
Division of Adult Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Room 4414
Washington, DC 20202-7240
(202) 732-2396
Contact: Tammy Fortune

Family English Literacy Programs
U.S. Department of Education
OBEMLA
400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Room 5620
Washington, DC 20202
(202) 205-9803
Contact: Mary T. Mahony

Family Study Institute
1603 S. Michigan Avenue, Suite 402
Chicago, IL 60616
(312) 427-1692
Offers training and materials for school-based parent education programs.

Home and School Institute
1201 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 466-3633
President: Dorothy Rich
Develops home–school–business–community partnerships to support student achievement by focusing on the family.

National Center for Family Literacy
325 W. Main Street, Suite 200
Louisville, KY 40202
(502) 584-1133
Director: Sharon Darling
Promotes family literacy programs and policies. Emphasizes the Kenan Model.

National Clearinghouse on Literacy Education (NCLE)
Center for Applied Linguistics
1118 22nd Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037
(202) 429-9292, ext. 200
Adjunct ERIC clearinghouse for adult ESL and literacy information. Digests, Q&As, and bibliographies are available at no charge. A directory of literacy programs, and ready-made searches can be purchased.

National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (NCBE)
1118 22nd Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037
(800) 321-NCBE
Director: Joel Gomez
Disseminates information on bilingual education and second language learning.

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Family Literacy for Language Minority Families: Issues for Program Implementation

Family Literacy for Language Minority Families: Issues for Program Implementation describes Project FLAME, a program that provides literacy training and support to Latino parents with limited proficiency in English. Currently in its fifth year, Project FLAME is operating in six Chicago, Illinois, elementary schools.

Project FLAME features two critical components—*Parents as Teachers* sessions and *Parents as Learners* sessions—designed to increase participating parents' English and native language literacy skills and empower them to play active roles in the literacy development and overall academic achievement of their children.

In *Family Literacy for Language Minority Families*, Mulhern, Rodriguez-Brown, and Shanahan address eight questions educators commonly have when planning and implementing a family literacy program. Drawing on their own experiences with Project FLAME, the authors describe flexible approaches to ensuring the success of family literacy programs for language minority families. A resource list and a sample lesson plan are included.

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